

VZCZCXYZ0019  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLJ #0178/01 0851527  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 261527Z MAR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5658  
INFO RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO PRIORITY 0026

UNCLAS LJUBLJANA 000178

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SENSITIVE

PM/WRA FOR ETRIMAKAS AND HMCCLLOY, EUR/ACE FOR CDUNN,  
EUR/NCE FOR SSADLE, SARAJEVO FOR MFLEMING, EUR/SCE FOR  
MFOOKS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MASS MARR PREL KCRM BK SI

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: ITF ADVISORY BOARD HEARS USG POINTS ON  
BOSNIAN DEMINING ALLEGATIONS

REF: A. LJUBLJANA 81  
    1B. 2006 LJUBLJANA 758  
    1C. SARAJEVO 369

11. (SBU) Summary. DCM Maryruth Coleman delivered talking points on allegations of impropriety in the Bosnian demining sector during the International Trust Fund for Demining (ITF) spring Advisory Board Meeting March 20. After an initial stumble in responding, ITF Director Goran Gacnik told the Advisory Board that ITF is "cooperating with authorities" and working in "close cooperation with the State Department." Others in the donor community expressed interest in receiving more information about USG findings when they are available. End Summary.

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Allegations in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
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12. (U) DCM Maryruth Coleman attended the spring ITF Advisory Board Meeting March 20 at the Civil Defense Training Center next to ITF Headquarters in Ig, Slovenia. The meeting, as usual, was attended by local Embassy representatives of ITF donor countries, as well as other parties interested in demining issues. During the open comment period DCM relayed the full set of talking points (reference March 3 email from PM/WRA) on the investigation into mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After leading with a statement about the U.S.'s continuing confidence in ITF, she noted the quality and capacity review that was being conducted, as well as the current investigation by the Bosnian prosecutors office. When asked if he had a response to the comments by the current board chair, ITF Director Goran Gacnik said "no" and the meeting was suspended for the coffee break.

13. (SBU) During the coffee break, DCM was approached by British, Austrian, and South Korean diplomats and United Nations Development Program Bosnia Representative Seid Turkovic, who all said they were interested in learning about the findings of any investigations and asked how and when a report would be distributed to other donors.

14. (U) After the break, Gacnik addressed the comments, telling the Advisory Board that ITF "is cooperating with authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the investigation of three or four companies, and these companies will now not be included in the tender process." He said ITF is awaiting the findings of these investigations, is working in "close cooperation with the State Department," and believes the tendering process will move forward in the first half of April.

¶5. (U) The Bosnia and Herzegovina representative at the meeting, Darko Vidovic, offered the only other comment, giving his thanks to ITF and telling the group that the referenced investigation has the "full support of the Bosnian government," that they want transparent results, and, if needed, the prosecutor will "go after" transgressors. He said he would welcome any additional information anyone had, and noted that previous allegations had put a "gray shadow" on Bosnia and Herzegovina and that he hoped this investigation would provide "clarity, once and for all." He concluded by thanking the USG for its cooperation and support with the investigation.

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Other ITF Advisory Board Meeting Topics  
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¶6. (U) In addition to the typical overview of donor funding and activities, ITF representatives talked about several new issues for the organization. They reported that ITF was in talks with the Government of Slovenia about the possibility of special initiatives for the organization during Slovenia's EU Presidency in the first half of 2008. They also sought the Advisory Board's input on restructuring Advisory Board meetings so that the annual spring meeting would cover past activities and the fall meeting would cover future plans, thus enabling more strategic input from the Advisory Board for upcoming activities. They indicated they would send a written proposal of this concept to all ITF Advisory Board members for comment.

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QSI Pays Courtesy Call on Embassy and ITF Headquarters  
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¶7. (SBU) PolOff met with Richard Cassidy and Walt McCauley from Quality Solutions International (QSI) on March 14 after the conclusion of their survey of potential ITF contractor organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and before their meeting to discuss the findings with ITF Headquarters in Ig, Slovenia. Cassidy and McCauley told PolOff they had seen widely differing levels of competence from the potential demining contractors, but found that there are enough organizations that are "capable and credible" to allow for a competitive bidding process in the near future. QSI officials shared their overall impressions of the situation in demining, noting in particular widespread bureaucratic problems, project tenders divided into very small land areas (thus giving "everybody gets a chance" to win at least a small project), and general disinterest from nearly every party involved to "make a call" on how and when to move forward with the tendering process. PolOff asked Cassidy and McCauley to contact him after the meeting with ITF Headquarters if they were anything other than fully cooperative.

¶8. (SBU) Comment. ITF Director Goran Gacnik's initial nonresponsiveness to DCM Coleman's comments was more a sign of his lack of political savvy than cause for concern, though it highlights the difficulties ITF continues to have in offering a strong, forthright message about transparency and accountability. After the coffee break Gacnik managed to pull together a reasonable response to calm the nerves of the donor community. Attendees also found the Bosnian representative's remarks encouraging. As before, ITF continues to welcome USG actions, including the investigations from Quality Solutions International, and Gacnik continues to tell Embassy Ljubljana that ITF is completely on board with all USG plans to investigate allegations in the Bosnian demining sector. End Comment.

ROBERTSON